

**Testimony Regarding
S.B. 1028, An Act Implementing the Recommendations
of the Department of Education**

Lisa Hammersley, Executive Director
School and State Finance Project

Chairmen McCrory and Currey, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding S.B. 1028, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education.

Our organization agrees with the CSDE's recommendation to revise the Alliance District program to provide supports and interventions to the lowest-performing districts in the state. There is a greater opportunity, however, to re-imagine the Alliance District program to better serve Connecticut's students, schools, and communities.

Simply removing the districts that are no longer among the state's lowest-performing from the technical definition of an Alliance District, without providing a comprehensive transition from the financial pieces of the program, would result in the State providing continued resources to districts that are no longer qualified. In addition, S.B. 1028 does not address additional concerns with the current structure of the program.

Under current statute and this bill, Alliance Districts are determined based on their performance relative to other districts. Specifically, Alliance Districts are the 33-lowest performing districts in the state and any original Alliance District. As a result, these districts are provided extra support to improve student performance and outcomes. However, the recommendations made by the CSDE continue to ignore the adverse impacts created by limiting the program to an arbitrary number of low-performing districts instead of creating a threshold based on the outcomes, growth, and achievement outlined in Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System.

Because the Alliance District program is not connected to desired outcomes and achievement, three scenarios are possible under current law that do not align with the program's original intent — two of which are currently taking place. In the first scenario, a district whose performance has still not improved can lose its Alliance District designation because another district's performance has decreased to a greater extent. Secondly, there are currently districts with lower index scores than some districts receiving the supports provided through the Alliance District program.

For example, of all local and regional public schools, 51 districts have a Next Generation Accountability Index (NGAI) score that is lower than the highest NGAI for an Alliance District. Most of these districts are ineligible due to school district size and may score lower

due to legacy Alliance Districts. Conversely, there could come a time when all districts could be meeting standards of achievement and there be no need for the additional supports outlined in the program. However, districts would still be subject to standards of accountability given the structure of the Alliance District program.

Given that the CSDE recommends making modifications to the program beginning in fiscal year 2028, there is ample time to have meaningful conversations about how districts should be determined to be Alliance Districts and how appropriate supports can be provided to ensure academic progress. The entire program requires an overhaul and there is time to do so thoughtfully through sound public policy without arbitrary numbers and potentially harmful transitions for impacted districts.

We are asking the legislature to examine the criteria needed for districts to qualify as an Alliance District and to ensure a meaningful connection between educational investment and the improvement of student outcomes, growth, and achievement, instead of one that only supports the 33-lowest performing districts. Creating a standards-based system that connects outcomes to investment would position the state to support our highest-need districts and help ensure the success of all Connecticut's students.

As a result, we are asking the General Assembly to pause and regroup on this topic rather than passing this legislation that continues the status quo.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this piece of legislation, and please feel free to contact me anytime should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lisa Hammersley
Executive Director
School and State Finance Project
lisa.hammersley@schoolstatefinance.org

About the School and State Finance Project

The School and State Finance Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy organization that works collaboratively with policymakers, communities, and other key stakeholders to develop data-driven solutions that ensure all public school students receive equitable education funding that supports their learning needs.